

End of the Road by corruptsardines

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Family, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-07-15 03:25:47

Updated: 2019-07-15 03:25:47

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:58:53

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,657

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Eleven searches for Hopper, but is surprised by what she finds.

End of the Road

Eleven's steps were slow but steady, her breaths shallow and fists clenched. As her bare feet dragged through the shallow water she slowly opened her eyes, finding herself in pitch black.

She came to a stop and looked around. Darkness stretched for as far as the eye could see. The sheer nothingness always made her chest feel heavy and her body cold, but there was a strange relief in finally coming back. It almost felt like coming home.

Taking deep breaths, she focused herself. Her mind cleared until she saw nothing but his face, remembering the way he talked, and held himself and how he always smelled of either coffee or cheap alcohol. A smile came to her face as she remembered his signature smirk, and the sparkle in his eyes when she'd made him laugh.

Her shoulders fell and her grin faded. She couldn't find him. Tears began to well in her tired eyes. Maybe Joyce was right. Maybe he was really gone.

She wiped away the one tear that trickled down her cheek and steadied herself. She wasn't giving up yet. Her powers had only just come back, maybe she still wasn't strong enough. Reluctantly, she slipped off the blindfold, sat up and wiped the bathwater from her eyes. She held her knees to her chest and rested her chin on them, letting herself sit for a moment in the lukewarm water.

Something felt off. She came to, and realized she wasn't in the Byer's house. The tub was yellow and cracked, and the room was unkempt, with surfaces gathering dust. The walls were painted a warm beige, the hue mottled from water damage. The smells of firewood and beer wafted in through a dry-rotting door. She could hear the faint murmurs of what seemed to be late-night television. She was back in the cabin. In Hopper's cabin.

Her breaths became shallow as she tumbled out of the tub, soaking the timber floorboards. She gasped when she caught herself in the mirror - where her shoulder length waves should have been there were short curls. Her upper lip was smeared with fresh blood. She

grabbed some toilet roll and tried to stem the flow of the nosebleed.

Eleven gathered her thoughts. The girl looking back at her was her younger self. For the first time she realised how much she had changed in the past few years - it wasn't just her hair that was shorter now, she was shorter too, and her cheekbones less defined. She was dressed in one of Hopper's old flannels, with more muted tones than what an older her would have chosen. Her eyes seemed fresher, as if she was carrying just a little less weight on her shoulders than before she got into the bathtub.

Her heart raced as she stepped towards the door. She turned the knob, letting it creak open just enough so that she could peek through the gap.

There he was, sitting in his armchair, beer in one hand and a lit cigarette in another, wearing his khaki police uniform. He was gazing mindlessly at the television, but on hearing the creak of the door he turned to look at Eleven, giving her a warm grin.

The door swung open, and she froze, staring at Hopper in awe. She burst towards him. He caught her in a tight embrace and held her, as she sobbed into his shirt. He ran his fingers through her hair playfully.

"You took your time finding me," he whispered.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Hop, I was trying, but I couldn't -"

"Shh, it's okay, I was only joking. I was only joking, El. Jesus it's good to see you."

Eleven pulled away from Hopper and wiped her eyes. She had gotten blood on his shirt but he didn't seem to mind. He was leaned back in the chair, his legs spread slightly and elbows sitting on the armrests, with a demeanour far too calm for someone who is meant to be a month dead.

"I've missed you. I've missed you so much." Eleven whimpered.

"Me too, kid. Me too."

"Where are you? Where are we?" she looked around the cabin frantically. Her eyes met Hopper's and her tone lowered to a whisper - "Are you - are you dead?"

"How would I know? You're the smart one, El. All I know is that I'm damn glad to have you back, " He patted the armrest to his right and gestured for her to sit. She clambered onto the chair and curled up beside him, resting her head on his broad shoulder. Hopper spoke again, gently stroking Eleven's arm - "Forget about what happened. Just tell me everything. Where are you staying? You being looked after okay?"

"But, but - the Russians, and the explosion and -"

"Eleven listen to me. Let's just forget about that for now. Just for one evening. Just for one evening let's talk, like it's the good old days."

"I'm staying with Joyce."

"Joyce? Joyce Byers? She's still in Hawkins?"

"No, Hop. We moved a month ago."

"I see," he muttered, taking a swig from his beer bottle. He took a deep breath before continuing. "What's that like?"

"It's okay. I've started school there. I'm still catching up with the other kids, but I'm doing okay."

"I bet you're glad of all those lessons I gave back then, huh?"

"Eleven giggled. "Yeah, I am. I'm so grateful for everything, Hop." She paused and stared into the distance bleakly. "Joyce told me about what happened. She told me you, you sacrificed yourself for us. For all of us."

It was Hopper's turn to chuckle. "You make me sound like some kind of hero, El. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time." There was a moment of silence. He could feel Eleven tense.

"Joyce really misses you, you know," she said. She swallowed shakily. "That Friday, after everything, Joyce took me to that restaurant."

"Enzo's?"

"Yeah, Enzo's. We went at 7, just like you had planned, just the two of us, and we talked. We told each other stories about you, we talked about who you were - or are."

Hopper sighed and scratched his beard. "Kid, maybe I'm dead. Maybe this is what dying is like. But if I'm not, I'll probably be dead soon."

Eleven placed her hand on the side of his face. "Where are you?" she whispered. "What does it feel like?"

He took her hand off his face and squeezed it. "I don't know. I just don't know. It's cold and it's dark. That's all I can tell you." He shook his head. "But it doesn't matter, Eleven, because wherever I am, I'm not leaving anytime soon. You're going to have to keep going without me."

Tears started flowing from Eleven's eyes again. "But I can't," she sobbed, leaning her head into Hopper's chest. "I can't. I love you. I need you, Hop."

He wrapped his arms around her. "Eleven, there was this - God it seems so stupid now - but there was this speech I had wrote for you, you and Mike -"

"I know. I've read it."

"Yeah? And you remember what I said? About growing? About moving on?"

Eleven sniffed and nodded. Hopper placed his hand on her head. "I love you kid. And I can't have you waiting around for me, okay? You need to keep going. Jesus Christ all I want is for you to be happy. "

He grabbed her by her shoulders, giving her a smirk. His face dropped. The lower half of her face was red, scarlet blood oozing from her nose steadily.

" Jesus, El! Your face! "

She put her hand to her face, and looked at her fingers, now dripping

with her own blood. She was starting to feel lightheaded. There was a large red stain on Hopper's front. It made her nauseous to look at.

"Is, is this some kind of sign? Does this mean it's time for you to go?" Eleven could see he was trying to hide his panic. The bleeding was quickening, she was growing weaker by the second. He was right. It was time to go.

"You'll have to carry me," she croaked. "Carry me to the bath." He picked her up gently, gripping her between his arms. She held onto him, never wanting to let go. She noted how he smelled and felt, trying to engrave this moment into her memory.

He sat her down on the edge of the tub. He tucked a curl behind her ear and stroked her cheek softly. Blood was streaming out of her nose, and dropping onto her flannel. A few tears rolled down her jaw.

"This is it kid, this is it." his voice was croaky from trying to hold back tears. "Now you tell all the others that I'm proud of them. So proud. What we did that evening, it - it wasn't easy. And I care about each and every one of you kids so much. And tell Joyce I loved her." He stopped and shook his head. "Tell Joyce that I regret not telling her I love her sooner."

Eleven nodded solemnly.

"And you, you remember what I said in that speech. Don't you ever forget."

"Three inches?"

"Three fucking inches."

He lowered her into the water. She took the wet blindfold, and pulled it over her head.

He took her hand, for one last time. "I love you, Eleven Hopper."

"I love you, Dad."

He pulled the blindfold over her eyes. She lowered her head into the water, cleared her mind, and let go.